



OBBBA Piece-by-Piece: A Closer Look at Volunteering as a Qualifying Work Activity

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On June 1, 2026, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [released a major Interim Final Rule](#) (IFR) implementing key Medicaid eligibility and enrollment provisions enacted under the so-called [One Big Beautiful Bill Act \(OBBBA\)](#), also known as H.R. 1. The rule established the federal framework for new Medicaid work requirements, which states must implement for individuals enrolled in the Medicaid Expansion group or certain 1115 waiver demonstrations beginning January 1, 2027. Our "[Piece-by-Piece](#)" series takes a closer look at specific elements of the IFR so state advocates know the right questions to ask, even as we recognize that ultimately the best harm mitigation strategy for work requirements is repeal. This piece focuses on volunteering as a qualifying work activity.

One way individuals may satisfy the monthly work requirement is through community service. Because many Medicaid beneficiaries volunteer in their communities, advocates have asked whether volunteering with a nonprofit organization counts as a qualifying activity. The answer is generally "yes," however, not every volunteer activity will automatically qualify.

Community Service Through a Nonprofit Can Count

The IFR defines "community service" as unpaid work through a structured program that is completed for the direct benefit of the community under the supervision of a public or nonprofit organization. CMS based this definition on the existing TANF definition of community service.¹

States must make community service available as a pathway for satisfying the work requirement. They cannot, for example, permit compliance through employment and work programs while refusing to recognize qualifying community service.²

What Does a Nonprofit Volunteer Program Need to Do?

Volunteering can only qualify as a community service if it occurs through a structured program. CMS explains that the public or nonprofit organization must provide oversight and have a process for tracking each of the following:

- The type of community service activity;
- The dates on which the service was performed;

- The number of hours completed; and
- A point of contact who can confirm the individual's hours.

CMS does not impose a separate supervision requirement but rather concludes that requiring the activity to occur through a structured program provides sufficient assurance the activity has been completed. An individual therefore cannot independently perform an activity and have it qualify as community service unless it is under the umbrella of an organization meeting the requirements of the federal definition.

Volunteering or unpaid work?

An unpaid activity that does not meet the IFR's definition of "community service" may still qualify under another qualifying activity, such as "work," which CMS defines more broadly to include certain forms of unpaid work. This issue is outside the scope of this resource and will be addressed separately.

The Organization Does Not Have to Be a 501(c)(3)

CMS expressly prohibits states from limiting qualifying community service to organizations recognized as tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Other organizations may also operate structured programs that benefit their communities, including local governments agencies, religious nonprofits, and smaller social service providers.

Types of Volunteering Activities That Can Count

States are responsible for determining which specific activities qualify, but the activity must directly benefit the community by addressing a community, civic, or public need and cannot serve a partisan purpose. Purely personal or recreational activities do not qualify. For example, helping a friend move does not qualify but providing moving assistance through a structured program through an organization that offers service broadly to community members may qualify. Attending a child's teacher conference, participating in school events, and joining a recreational dance or sports club also do not qualify.

Training, if embedded in a community service program, may also count toward the individual's community-service hours provided it helps the individual develop skills necessary to perform the service. For example, an individual attending computer training to develop skills needed to provide technology tutoring to seniors may count those hours because the training is integral to the community service being provided.

Community Service Can Be Combined with Other Activities

Individuals do not have to complete 80 hours of community service alone. Community-service hours can be combined with hours from work, qualifying work programs, and education when the individual is enrolled in school less than half-time. For example, an individual who works 40 hours during the month and completes 40 hours of qualifying community service could satisfy the 80 hours requirement through the combination of those activities.

Advocacy Considerations

Although the IFR established a federal definition of community service, states retain responsibility for determining which particular activities satisfy that definition. This creates important implementation questions for advocates.

States should implement community-service policies broadly enough to recognize the many ways Medicaid beneficiaries already contribute to their communities. At the same time, CMS's requirement that community service occur through a "structured program" could create barriers for individuals volunteering through small or informal community organizations that may not currently maintain formal timekeeping systems.

Advocates should pay particular attention to how states define a "structured program," what documentation they require from volunteers and nonprofit organizations, and whether their verification procedures unnecessarily create administrative burdens for smaller community-based organizations.

¹ 42 C.F.R. § 435.552(b).

² 42 C.F.R. § 435.552(a).